

THE BROKEN PLATE OF MY FAMILY

Julie Bennie prose

I had completely forgotten about it. I found it in my cupboard, hidden underneath muddled piles of jerseys and jeans, neglected like an abandoned old toy from my younger years. I struggled to lift it; it was a lot heavier than I remembered, or perhaps I had become much weaker since I last picked it up. I stared at it for a moment before I turned the heavy cover. For the first time in months, I had found the courage to look through my parent's wedding album.

The pages had aged with the years. The once gleaming, flawless pages had wrinkled into light brown creases. The photographs, however, had not lost their glamorous quality. I viewed endless photographs of my family members drinking glittering champagne that complimented the twinkles in their bright smiles. Both sides of the family were dancing together to the iconic moves from the song Macarena. Every photograph captured the celebration of two families, the product of my parent's marriage, which had newly joined into one. The golden evening of December 20th 1996 marked the creation of

our family plate, one that was new and undented.

My parents obviously feature in most of the photographs; they gaze at each other with a beautiful fondness. I pause when I come across one particular photograph, one in which their arms are entangled in one another. Their young eyes glimmer with naïve excitement. My father was most likely imagining names for his unborn children, while my mother was probably daydreaming of their honeymoon and holidays to come. I glance again at their entangled arms. It scares me to think how much things can change.

This young couple's future indeed did involve two bubbly babies and adventures abroad, yet was also abundant with hardships and intense arguing which formed uncomfortable cracks in the family plate.

It took 16 years for the plate to finally shatter, when my father finally gave up on finding glue to fix it. Initially, divorce papers fell lightly around me like snow, but soon they transformed into a vicious blizzard of paper and ink that left me shivering. My home became one of violent whispers,

abruptly shut doors and angry emails, as my parents attempted to disguise the inevitable from me and my brother.

Words like ‘settlement’, ‘lawyer’ and ‘legal fees’ became part of my daily vocabulary as they forged boundaries between the two sides of my family. Those joyful family members from the photographs no longer dance to the same song. Every cousin, uncle, and grandparent of mine belongs to a specific team aimed at a specific opponent, either my mother or my father. My brother and I are the only ones who don’t belong to a side: we are not sure of which side to choose. We stand alone as outcasts in our own family.

When our plate shattered, my parents charged at each other, hastily grabbing the pieces they needed. Whether it was the car, or the bond on our house, my mother and father were determined to receive what they thought they rightfully owned. They are so caught up in the snowstorm, however, they have forgotten about my brother and I. I know that they love us, but the chaos of their battle has left their minds too preoccupied, only fizzling with dominant anger towards one another. How are we coping? It doesn’t cross their minds to ask.

Justin and I are the only ones who hold fond memories of lazy Saturday breakfasts, special birthdays and family car trip games. I no longer have the security of a complete family, the beautiful unbroken plate that I had always taken for granted,

yet I still have my little brother by my side. We hold each other’s hands as we proceed through the snowstorm. People often comment on how close we are for a brother and sister, although I don’t think they entirely understand what significance our sibling bond holds for us.

It is the only remaining piece of our family plate that has not yet been broken.